

BIRMINGHAM REALTY COMPANY BUILDING
Birmingham Industrial District
2118 First Ave. N
Birmingham
Jefferson County
Alabama

HABS No. AL-980

HABS
ALA
37-BIRM,
25-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO
BIRMINGHAM REALTY COMPANY BUILDING
Birmingham Industrial District
2118 First Avenue N.
Birmingham
Jefferson County
Alabama

HABS No. AL-980

HABS

37-BIRM,

25-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 7127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO
BIRMINGHAM REALTY COMPANY BUILDING

HABS No. AL-980

HABS
ALA
37-BIRM,
25-

Location: 2118 First Avenue North, Birmingham, Jefferson County Alabama. Birmingham Realty is easily accessible from First Avenue North, a main street in the Birmingham City Center. Arrangements must be made to visit interior spaces.

Ownership: Birmingham Realty Co.

Date of Construction: 1905

Builder/Architect/Engineer: William C. Weston

Project Information: This report is based upon written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Significance: This building houses the Birmingham Realty Company whose financing and planning created the city of Birmingham. This finely-detailed Beaux Arts building also houses an exceptional collection of maps and artifacts charting the firm's influential role developing the original city, its industrial base, and its suburbs.

Period of Significance: Building: 1905; collection: 1871-1920s

DESCRIPTION

This two-story, yellow-brown brick Beaux Arts style building features a godhead centered within an arch at the second story of the front facade. At the rear of the 25' x 125' building is a 25' x 25' garden. William C. Weston designed this corporate headquarters, among the first in the city built for an individual corporate client.

Interior spaces include a two-story, skylit central area with teller cages to transact property sales, a board room, offices, vault and collection of maps and artifacts charting the company's role in development of the city on display throughout the building.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 1905, Birmingham Realty Company, the successor corporation to the Elyton Land Company which founded the city in 1871, established its headquarters in this building. Previous to this location the company had shared a multi-use structure whose elaborate cornice and metal detailing must have seemed out-of-date for a company that aspired to continue its role as the city's premier real estate firm. Neighbors in the 2100 block of First Avenue North at this time were public utility, streetcar railway and other real estate firms.

William C. Weston, a New Zealand born architect and former associate of the Daniel Burnham firm in Chicago, designed this sophisticated, corporate headquarters, among the first in the city built for an single corporate entity.

In 1905, Birmingham Realty was still selling residential lots from the 4,150 acres of the original city and also from its South Highlands tract: 1,500 acres lying to the north of Eighth Avenue South along the northern flank of Red Mountain. This property includes Five Points South, Glen Iris Park, Southside, Highland Avenue and Lakeview Park. At this time, the company was also developing Norwood, a streetcar suburb just to the north of the original city grid and close to industrial plants in North Birmingham.

The Elyton Land Company, the 10 men who met in Montgomery in December, 1870 with intent to build an industrial center in the mineral lands of northern Alabama, had done a spectacular job by 1905. The company, in addition to selecting the site for the city and hiring a railroad engineer, William Barker, to plan and survey that site, platted wide streets and avenues, alleys and blocks with land systematically dividing the land. They also successfully recruited railroads and industrial corporations to fill their empty blocks platted in the overgrown cornfields. By the 1880s, the

original Railroad Reservation, the central feature of the city plan, had filled with railroad uses (depots, stations, shops and yards, and warehouses) and industrial plants. Rails and industry successfully drove the economy of the new city, the center of a growing industrial district. The city center and residential districts would experience their most accelerated early growth in the years from 1905 to World War I.

CONDITION

Thanks to a recent restoration, this office building appears much as it did in 1905 when Birmingham Realty opened its doors to sell lots in the early city. Beneath a stained-glass skylight are the original teller cages and cash register. The original board room with mantle and furnishing also remain, as does the rear garden with terra cotta planters and interior oak balusters, rails, moldings and light fixtures.

Sources Consulted

Birmingham Historical Society, Downtown Birmingham Building Files,
Birmingham Realty Company Building

Birmingham Realty Company Map and Artifact Collection exhibited and
used throughout the company's offices.